
3/9/1 (Item 1 from file: 47) DIALOG(R)File 47:Gale Group Magazine DB(TM) (c) 2004 The Gale group. All rts. reserv.

02595980 **Supplier Number:** 00603936 (THIS IS THE FULL TEXT)
A 'Blue Chip' Mailroom Investment.

Modern Office Technology , v29 , n8 , p98
Aug. , 1984

ISSN: 0746-3839

Language: ENGLISH **Record Type:** FULLTEXT; ABSTRACT
Word Count: 862 **Line Count:** 00071

Abstract: Merrill Lynch Pierce Fenner & Smith Inc. has been using Shippystems Ltd.'s Computerized Package Manifesting System since May 1983. This system calculates shipping costs and verifies destination and carrier codes. The computer system is fast, efficient, secure, cost-effective and virtually error-free. This modular system is reliable and can be expanded or changed to meet the future needs of a company. A photograph of the system in operation is included.

Text:

Merrill Lynch Pierce Fenner & Smith Inc., long known for being bullish on America, becomes a real bear when its private-carrier mail is delayed.

In the volatile business of selling stocks and bonds, it is important that time-sensitive--and often confidential -- material from the Merrill Lynch New York City headquarters gets to regional offices as quickly and efficiently as possible. About 800 packages are sent by express couriers each day to the company's 600 foreign and domestic offices. To help speed this, Merrill Lynch recently installed a computerized mail manifesting system from Ship-systems, Ltd., Atlanta.

The Computerized Package Manifesting System, installed in May, 1983, enables the distribution center in New York to operate faster, with greater control and security, while using fewer people, says Jim Cioffi, Merrill Lynch assistant vice president and manager of transportation services. Two people can now do the work of three or more in the center, and the \$22,675 system is projected to save enough money to pay for itself in eight to 10 months, Cioffi adds. The entry level custom system price begins at \$15,900.

Computer printouts, microfiche, research reports, prospecti, interoffice correspondence, commodity publications, and other materials are some of the typical kinds of shipments originating from headquarters.

Before installing the computerized system, package manifesting was a manual procedure: Handwritten information and manual tallying slowed down the operation and led to errors, especially when someone's handwritten manifest had to be deciphered. Each manifest required several documents as well. Searching through this documentation could devour time when a parcel had to be traced.

The Computerized Package Manifesting System helped solve some of these problems as well as streamline manifesting. Now, packages up to 200 lb are weighed on an electronic scale, and the weight is displayed on a digital read-out for the distribution center workers. The person manifesting the package then uses a small hand-held portable entry handle--at a remote data entry station about 150 feet from the computer--to enter the package identification number, the correct express courier code,

and the destination identifier. The information from the remote station is transmitted through a cable connection to the computer.

*the computer system then takes over. It calculates the package's shipping cost and verifies the destination and carrier codes. If Purolator Courier is selected, but for example, the DHL World-wide Courier Express Air System code is entered, the computer system will query the worker, in essence, asking: "Did you really mean that?" Cioffi says this self-checking has made manifesting virtually error-free.

Multiple package shipments to the same destination are faster because a repeat key can automatically complete the manifest once the package is weighed in. The system also improves package information security because there are no longer several unsecured documents for each bundle. Instead, the system's printer, CRT display, computer, disk drive, and diskettes are kept in a locked office. As scale signals and data entered by the operator are transmitted to the computer, the printer automatically generates the necessary shipping manifest.

Efficiency as well as security is served by centralized computer operations. During the day, a supervisor can enter the office and, at the touch of a button, get computer generated reports showing the number of parcels and their weights, for each carrier. This allows for better scheduling of carrier pick-ups and reduces truck turn-around time. Trucks leaving the distribution center have all of the packages being sent to a destination. The report also makes for precise shipping cost allocation because it displays running totals for each courier.

Merrill Lynch also has the option to have the manifesting program changed by Shipsystems via telephone. A modem attached to the system in New York permits programs or rates to be updated over regular telephone lines from Shipsystem's headquarters in Atlanta.

"I've searched for a system like this for many years," Cioffi says. "Before the current installation, we had a similar type of system from a different manufacturer, but found it too slow and inaccurate. There were also too many breakdowns." The system now in operation has only broken down since its installation, Cioffi notes. Shortly after it was installed, a connection broke, but very little productivity time was lost. The system diagnosed its own problem, enabling it to be quickly corrected.

"We now have better control over our entire shipping operation, from the standpoints of information, people, equipment, costs, and other factors; plus, the ability to quickly trace any shipment," Cioffi explains. "Especially significant, is the fact the system will become even more vital to us as Merrill Lynch grows larger and more diverse. Yet, because of its modular design, the computerized manifest system can be economically expanded and changed to meet any future requirements, expansion for instance, we may have."

The Shipsystems Computerized Mail Manifesting System has brought computer power to "bear" on the Merrill Lynch distribution center. And that's no "bull."

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Special Features: illustration; photograph

Company Names: Merrill Lynch and Company Inc.--Purchasing

Trade Names: Computerized Package Manifesting System

File Segment: MI File 47